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AUTHOR	Thom, Joseph M.
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ABSTRACT

The new library/media center at Port Jefferson High School, Long Island, was designed to use and integrate all formats and media. In addition to meeting the traditional responsibilities of a library, the center participates in the educational process by broadcasting over 100 television programs per week. (Author/PF)

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Library Media Center — Port Jefferson High School

by Joseph M. Thom

Tablets in a school lobby commemorate the obvious. Rarely do they give credit to the years of planning and support of persons and groups without whom the facility would not have been constructed: the teachers, students, former school board members, and a host of people from state agencies. The design of the new library facility at the Port Jefferson High School had its beginning early in my tenure as its librarian. Twelve years ago, when I was appointed to the staff of the Port Jefferson High School, over 1700 students were being served by a library collection of 6000 volumes in a room of about 800 square feet. A superb faculty, literate and imaginative, and a student body with unsatisfied intellectual needs made the drive for adequate library services and facilties an all-consuming one.

What gave the drive for new and improved library services a chance for success was a Board of Education which agreed that the library in its then present condition would not meet the needs of a modern educational program. What assured the success was a Supervising Principal who opened lines of communication between the librarian and the Board. As librarian, I was able to make my views known to the Board of Education. To be able to communicate with the Board was probably the most important element in developing the design and construction of the new library facility at Port Jefferson High School. As librarian, my views were not only sought but were part of the final approval process. I developed the specifications for all equipment and furnishings of the new library media center, and when necessary, was authorized to seek help from professional and paid consultants.

Technology was an important influence in Port Jefferson Public Schools' redesigning and redefining the role of its libraries from that of a non-programmed educational center to a center in which the student may pursue his "programmed" educational and intellectual needs.

The uniqueness of the Port Jefferson High School's library media center is its use and integration of all formats and media. The library continues to meet the traditional responsibilities of making available a reasonable inventory of material that reflects our intellectual and cultural heritage. In this respect, the student may supplement, reinforce, and expand his educational experience. In the expanded view, that of a programmed learning center, the library is an integral part of the school's formal educational process. The library offers courses of study where in the past courses of study were not feasible. It offers new dimensions and levels of understanding to a course of study where the limitations of the printed word inhibited learning. It offers increased opportunities to learn.

Mr. Thom is Coordinator of Library Media Services, Port Jefferson Public Schools.

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The ability of the library to involve itself in the educational process, and the extent of the involvement, are due in large part to the scientific and technical advances in communication - specifically the systems of information and data handling. It is reasonable to conclude that the advanced and improved techniques of transmitting and receiving messages help make library materials more accessible to the library user, and the new and improved techniques enable the library user to manipulate the library materials - actually handle them, regardless of the format or media.

Of all the new media available, the Port Jefferson Public School concluded that the television medium had the characteristics or the capabilities that were most compatible with library responsibilities. Television is capable of recording, storing, and retrieving information and data. Further, the state of the art in television enables the "reader" or the library client to handle the information in this format with almost the same efficiency as with printed material - as a "cool" medium, the viewer is thus able to be more creative. With due respect to those who hold that the medium is the message, it is the message that concerns the librarian, the student, and the teacher. The librarian is thankful to the technologist for affording improved techniques of handling information and data, for no longer being limited to or inhibited by the printed word or published material to convey an idea or transmit a concept.

Television was seen in Port Jefferson as a mass medium that could be reconstituted to a medium sensitive to individual and specific needs of an educational program. Over an eight-year period, with sought-after advice, help, and guidance from many sources, including the Bureau of Educational Television of the State Education Department and experts from the television industry, the Port Jefferson High School Library now has a television system that broadcasts over 100 programs per week. It has a collection of over 800 hours of video tape and video cassette. The collection includes video taped programs supplied by the Sate Education Department and in-house produced programs; non-video material that is convertible to the television medium, such as films, filmstrips, audio recordings, slides, etc; recordings of off-air programs such as presidential messages and speeches of outstanding personalities, and recordings of off-air programs originating with Channel 13, the New York educational television station, for delayed broadcast purposes.

The television facilities are a function of the library and administered by the librarian. The television system includes production and broadcast

facilities. For broadcasting, there is a master antenna distribution system of two cables to each receiving station: all classrooms and offices, the auditorium, the gym and the library. One cable distributes standard off-air television signals; the second is reserved for the closed circuit television broadcasts originating in the library. In addition to the classrooms, the closed circuit television outlets are located in 20 library carrels and the four library seminar rooms. Each carrel is furnished with a small television receiver and is also equipped to receive audio signals.

The library can broadcast over five CCTV channels simultaneously. Recent revisions to the system and the use of video cassettes permit 8 programs to be broadcasted simultaneously to library carrels. Requests from students and faculty for television programs for individual or group viewing may be satisfied within minutes of scheduling. Through the use of the video cassette playback equipment, the library is able to satisfy requests for programs at the circulation desk. TV and audio programs are serviced as the library services requests for a reserved book.

The production facilities, while sophisticated, are simple enough to be wholly student operated. In fact, it is the students who operate the broadcast system; the system is dependent on student involvement.

Port Jefferson's television system has extended the potential of the educational program in the following ways:

1 Courses of study that were not economically or administratively feasible have been added to the high school's educational program.
2 Courses of study have been made available to an increased number of students.
3 The ability of the teacher to individualize his instruction has been extended.
4 The scope of the curriculum has been extended.
5 The ability of the teacher to reach the marginal reader or slower learner has been extended.